

## SEMICONDUCTOR INTEGRATED CIRCUIT

## 5 TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates to a semiconductor integrated circuit and, more particularly, to the configuration of a register file with multiple ports.

## BACKGROUND ART

10 [0002] In a conventional semiconductor integrated circuit having a multiport register file, a plurality of functional blocks are connected to the multiport register file so that the functional blocks can process data in parallel.

[0003] For example, Patent Document 1 uses a register file of a multiport type where the number of write ports is 2 and the number of read ports is also 2 (2-Write 2-Read (2W2R)-type), wherein a 1W1R-type functional block and another 1W1R-type functional  
15 block are connected to the 2W2R port-type register file. Specifically, the 2W2R port-type register file provides two read ports and two write ports for one memory cell, wherein one read port and one write port are connected to a first functional block while the other read port and the other write port are connected to a second functional block.

20 [0004] It has been disclosed in Non-Patent Document 1, for example, that for such a transistor circuit including memory cells, there is a relationship between the threshold voltage of constituent transistors, the supply voltage to the constituent transistors, the activity rate of the constituent transistors and the power consumption thereof, i.e., there exist a threshold voltage and a supply voltage that minimize the power consumption under  
25 any given activity rate.

Patent Document 1: Japanese Laid-Open Patent Publication No. 11-175394

(FIG. 13)

Non-Patent Document 1: K. Nose et al., Optimization of VDD and VTH for low-power and high-speed applications, ASPDAC.00, pp. 469-474, Jan. 2000.

## 5 DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

### Problems to be Solved by the Invention

[0005] However, the conventional semiconductor integrated circuit having a multiport type register file has the following problems.

10 [0006] As described above, in a conventional multiport type register file, there are provided, for one memory cell, the same number of ports as the total number of write and read ports of a plurality of functional blocks connected thereto. Therefore, the multiport type register file has an increased area.

[0007] Moreover, in a case where, for example, one functional block connected thereto has a high activity rate (access frequency) and another functional block connected thereto has a low activity rate in the conventional multiport type register file, although there exist a supply voltage and a transistor threshold voltage that optimize, to minimum, the power consumption under one activity rate, the supply voltage and the threshold voltage are not optimal values when using the memory cell with the other activity rate, thereby failing to minimize the power consumption and thus wasting power.

20 [0008] In view of this, one possible approach is to, for example, employ a configuration where dedicated memory cells are used in each functional block, instead of employing a conventional configuration where memory cells are shared among a plurality of functional blocks. With this approach, for each memory cell dedicated to a functional block, it is possible to set a supply voltage and a threshold voltage corresponding to the activity rate of the functional block, whereby it is possible to effectively reduce the power consumption. Moreover, it is only required to provide each memory cell dedicated to a

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functional block with the same number of ports as the total number of read and write ports of the functional block, whereby it is possible to reduce the number of ports by the number of ports of the other functional blocks, thereby reducing the area.

[0009] With this approach, however, if data needed by a functional block is not stored

5 in a memory cell dedicated thereto but in another memory cell dedicated to a different functional block, it is necessary to relocate the data to the memory cell dedicated to the first functional block and then read the data from the memory cell dedicated to the first functional block. In this case, one possible approach is to, for example, employ a configuration where data already stored in the dedicated memory cell of the first functional  
10 block is once saved to an external register, after which the data is transferred from the dedicated memory cell of the second functional block to the dedicated memory cell of the first functional block. This approach, however, requires external save registers, data buses connected thereto, etc., thereby requiring an amount of time for accessing data and increasing the area. Moreover, the minute process has come to a point where the gate  
15 length is on the order of ten nanometers, thereby showing problems, including the limit of lithography and the increase in the leak current due to the quantum effect.

[0010] In view of these problems, an object of the present invention is to provide a semiconductor integrated circuit having a multiport type register file, which is capable of  
20 accessing data within a short time while reducing the number of ports required for one memory cell.

#### Means for Solving the Problems

[0011] In order to achieve the object set forth above, the present invention basically employs a configuration where dedicated memory cells are used for each functional block, wherein if a functional block needs data of dedicated memory cells of another functional  
25 block, a data interchange operation between memory cells is performed in a memory cell array.

[0012] Specifically, a semiconductor integrated circuit of the present invention includes: first and second information holding circuits formed in a memory cell array for holding information; a first port section for inputting or outputting information, which is connected only to the first information holding circuit; a second port section for inputting or outputting information, which is connected only to the second information holding circuit; and an interchange circuit receiving an interchange control signal for interchanging, in the memory cell array, information held in the first information holding circuit and information held in the second information holding circuit with each other.

[0013] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein: the first and second port sections are each formed by a transistor circuit; and the transistor circuit of the first port section is formed by transistors of a threshold voltage and the transistor circuit of the second port section is formed by transistors of a different threshold voltage.

[0014] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein: an access frequency of the first port section and that of the second port section are different from each other; and the access frequency of the port section formed by transistors of a higher threshold voltage is lower than that of the port section formed by transistors of a lower threshold voltage.

[0015] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein a power source voltage supplied to the first port section and that supplied to the second port section are different from each other.

[0016] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein an access frequency of the port section of a lower power source voltage is lower than that of the port section of a higher power source voltage.

[0017] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein: the first and second information holding circuits are

each formed by a transistor circuit; and the transistor circuit of the first information holding circuit is formed by transistors of a threshold voltage and the transistor circuit of the second information holding circuit is formed by transistors of a different threshold voltage.

5 [0018] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein an access frequency of the information holding circuit formed by transistors of a higher threshold voltage is lower than that of the information holding circuit formed by transistors of a lower threshold voltage.

[0019] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated  
10 circuit as set forth above, wherein a power source voltage supplied to the first information holding circuit and that supplied to the second information holding circuit are different from each other.

[0020] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated  
15 circuit as set forth above, wherein an access frequency of the information holding circuit of a lower power source voltage is lower than that of the information holding circuit of a higher power source voltage.

[0021] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated  
20 circuit as set forth above, wherein: the interchange circuit includes a temporary holding circuit for temporarily holding information; and information held in the first information holding circuit and information held in the second information holding circuit are interchanged with each other via the temporary holding circuit based on the interchange control signal.

[0022] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated  
25 circuit as set forth above, wherein a completion of an interchange operation in which information held in the first information holding circuit and information held in the second information holding circuit are interchanged with each other is detected, upon which an

output of the interchange control signal is stopped.

[0023] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein a completion of an operation in which information that should be held in the first and second information holding circuits are held in the first and second information holding circuits is detected, after which the information held in the first information holding circuit and the information held in the second information holding circuit are interchanged with each other.

[0024] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein: the first and second port sections are each formed by a transistor circuit; each of the transistor circuits of the first and second port sections is formed by transistors of a transistor width according to an access speed of the port section; and the transistor width of the transistor circuit of the port section of a lower access speed is smaller than that of the transistor circuit of the port section of a higher access speed.

[0025] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein: the first and second information holding circuits are each formed by a transistor circuit; each of the transistor circuits of the first and second information holding circuits is formed by transistors of a transistor width according to an access speed of the port section that is connected to the information holding circuit; and the transistor width of the transistor circuit of the information holding circuit of a lower access speed is smaller than that of the transistor circuit of the information holding circuit of a higher access speed.

[0026] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein the temporary holding circuit is formed by a latch circuit.

[0027] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein the latch circuit is a differential circuit.

[0028] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated

circuit as set forth above, wherein the interchange circuit includes a latch circuit for temporarily holding information held in the information holding circuit of a lower power source voltage and outputting the held information to the information holding circuit of a higher power source voltage.

5 [0029] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein: the first and second port sections and the first and second information holding circuits are each formed by a transistor circuit; a group including the first port section and the first information holding circuit and a group including the second port section and the second information holding circuit each include a  
10 substrate voltage control circuit; and the substrate voltage control circuit of each group controls a threshold voltage of transistors forming the transistor circuits of the port section and the information holding circuit of the group to a threshold voltage according to an access frequency of the port section of the group.

[0030] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated  
15 circuit as set forth above, wherein: a group including the first port section and the first information holding circuit and a group including the second port section and the second information holding circuit each include a power source voltage control circuit; and the power source voltage control circuit of each group controls a power source voltage supplied to the port section and the information holding circuit of the group according to  
20 an information read time and an information write time for the port section of the group.

[0031] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein: the first and second port sections and the first and second information holding circuits are each formed by a transistor circuit; a group including the first port section and the first information holding circuit and a group  
25 including the second port section and the second information holding circuit each include a substrate voltage control circuit and a power source voltage control circuit; the substrate

voltage control circuit of each group controls a threshold voltage of transistors of the transistor circuits of the port section and the information holding circuit of the group to a predetermined threshold voltage; and the power source voltage control circuit of each group controls a power source voltage supplied to the port section and the information  
5 holding circuit of the group so as to control an information read time and an information write time for the port section of the group to respective predetermined times.

[0032] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein: the first and second port sections and the first and second information holding circuits are formed in a transistor parallel portion including a  
10 plurality of transistors arranged in parallel to one another; the port section and the information holding circuit of a lower operating speed are located in an edge portion of the transistor parallel portion; and the port section and the information holding circuit of a higher operating speed are located in an inner portion of the transistor parallel portion.

[0033] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated  
15 circuit as set forth above, wherein: the semiconductor integrated circuit includes first and second dummy information holding circuits formed in a cell array in which the first and second information holding circuits are formed; and the interchange control signal takes into account a interchange time required before information held in the first and second dummy information holding circuits are actually interchanged with each other, and an  
20 output of the interchange control signal is stopped after elapse of the interchange time.

[0034] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein a substrate in which the first port section is formed is separated from a substrate of the second port section.

[0035] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated  
25 circuit as set forth above, wherein a substrate in which the first information holding circuit is formed is separated from a substrate of the second information holding circuit.



[0036] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein the temporary holding circuit is formed by a transistor circuit, and a threshold value of transistors forming the transistor circuit is set to a threshold value according to an access frequency of the interchange control signal.

5 [0037] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein a power source voltage supplied to the temporary holding circuit is set to a voltage according an access frequency of the interchange control signal.

[0038] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated  
10 circuit as set forth above, wherein: an access speed of the first and second port sections is a predetermined speed; and an access frequency of the port section of a lower power source voltage is higher than that of the port section of a higher power source voltage.

[0039] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated  
15 circuit as set forth above, wherein an access frequency of the information holding circuit of a lower power source voltage is higher than that of the information holding circuit of a higher power source voltage.

[0040] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated  
circuit as set forth above, wherein: a power source voltage of the interchange circuit is  
higher than that of the information-inputting port section of a lower power source voltage;  
20 and the interchange circuit includes a latch circuit for temporarily holding information held  
in the information holding circuit connected to the information-inputting port section of a  
higher power source voltage and outputting the held information to the information  
holding circuit connected to the information-inputting port section of a lower power source  
voltage.

25 [0041] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated  
circuit as set forth above, wherein: the temporary holding circuit is formed by a first

inversion circuit and a second inversion circuit; an output of the first inversion circuit is connected to an input of the second inversion circuit; the second inversion circuit includes first and second NMOS transistors connected in series with each other; an input of the first inversion circuit is connected to an output of a first information-inputting port section, an output of a second information-inputting port section, and a drain of a first NMOS transistor of the second inversion circuit; the first NMOS transistor of the second inversion circuit has a gate connected to an output of the first inversion circuit and a source connected to a drain of the second NMOS transistor; and an output from the first or second information-inputting port section is input to a gate of the second NMOS transistor of the second inversion circuit.

[0042] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein: the number of the first or second information-inputting port sections is one; and a source of the second NMOS transistor of the second inversion circuit receives an inverted signal of a signal from the first or second information-inputting port section.

[0043] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein: the number of the first or second information-inputting port sections is more than one; the number of the second NMOS transistors of the second inversion circuit is equal to the number of the first or second port sections; the plurality of second NMOS transistor are connected in series with one another, and a source of one of the second NMOS transistors that is farthest away from the first NMOS transistor of the second inversion circuit is grounded; and a gate of each of the plurality of second NMOS transistors receives a signal from a corresponding one of the first or second port sections.

[0044] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein a signal from one of the first or second information-inputting port sections that has a high activity rate is input to a gate of the second NMOS

transistor that is farthest away from the first NMOS transistor of the second inversion circuit.

[0045] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, including: a first dummy circuit for reading data from the first information holding circuit and then writing data thereto, and performing a data interchange operation between the first and second information holding circuits; and a second dummy circuit for reading data from the second information holding circuit and then writing data thereto, and performing a data interchange operation between the first and second information holding circuits, wherein: a plurality of MOS transistors of the first dummy circuit all have the same MOS property, the MOS property being a diffusion layer concentration, a substrate voltage or a gate oxide film; some of a plurality of MOS transistors of the second dummy circuit have the same MOS property as that of the MOS transistors of the first dummy circuit, and the other MOS transistors of the second dummy circuit have a MOS property different from that of the MOS transistors of the first dummy circuit; the semiconductor integrated circuit includes a power source voltage adjustment circuit for adjusting power source voltages supplied to the first and second dummy circuits, wherein: the power source voltage adjustment circuit adjusts the power source voltage value for the first dummy circuit so as to control a delay value of an output signal from the first dummy circuit to a predetermined first reference delay value, and supplies the adjusted power source voltage value to some of the MOS transistors of the second dummy circuit having the same MOS property as that of the first dummy circuit; and the power source voltage adjustment circuit adjusts the power source voltage value for some of the MOS transistors of the second dummy circuit having a MOS property different from that of the MOS transistors of the first dummy circuit so as to control a delay value of an output signal from the second dummy circuit to a predetermined second reference delay value.

[0046] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated

circuit as set forth above, wherein: the first and second port sections and the first and second information holding circuits are each formed by a transistor circuit; a group including the first port section and the first information holding circuit and a group including the second port section, the second information holding circuit and the interchange circuit each have a power source voltage supply circuit for supplying a power source voltage of a different value; and a power source voltage value of the power source voltage supply circuit of each group is set to such a power source voltage value that a total sum of an information read time, an information write time and an information interchange time in a port section of the group is equal to a predetermined time.

[0047] In one embodiment, the present invention provides a semiconductor integrated circuit as set forth above, wherein the semiconductor integrated circuit is a multi-thread processor.

[0048] As described above, in the semiconductor integrated circuit of the present invention, the first information holding circuit is basically dedicated to the first port section, and the second information holding circuit is basically dedicated to the second port section, whereby the number of ports for each of these information holding circuits is reduced by the number of port sections other than the port section to which the information holding circuit is dedicated to. Moreover, when it is necessary for the second port section to read out information of the first information holding circuit, for example, the information of the first information holding circuit is relocated to the second information holding circuit by the interchange circuit in the memory cell array, whereby the information access speed is higher and the information can be accessed in a shorter amount of time as compared with a case where the information interchange operation is performed by providing an external save register, or the like.

[0049] Moreover, the information of the first information holding circuit is always read/written from/to the first port section dedicated thereto, whereby for the first

information holding circuit and the first port section, the power source voltage supplied thereto and the threshold voltage of constituent transistors thereof can be set to appropriate values according to the access frequency (activity rate) of the dedicated first port section, and it is therefore possible to optimize, to minimum, the power consumption of the first information holding circuit and the first port section. This similarly applies also to the second information holding circuit and the second port section.

[0050] Furthermore, according to the present invention, an information interchange operation between two information holding circuits is performed via a latch circuit. In this operation, the information of the information holding circuit operating at a lower power source voltage is latched in the latch circuit, and then output to the information holding circuit operating at a higher power source voltage, whereby the information of the information holding circuit of a lower power source voltage can desirably be relocated to the information holding circuit of a higher power source voltage. Therefore, there is no problem for the information holding circuit of a lower power source voltage even if the power source voltage is a low voltage.

[0051] In addition, according to the present invention, a port section and an information holding circuit of a lower operating speed are located in an edge portion of a transistor parallel portion where the transistor performance may deteriorate due to a strong influence of the STI (Shallow Trench Isolation: device separation region), and a port section and an information holding circuit of a higher operating speed are located in an inner portion of the transistor parallel portion where there is only a small influence of the STI, whereby the high operating speed and the stability of the port section and the information holding circuit of a higher operating speed are desirably ensured.

[0052] In addition, according to the present invention, an information interchange operation between two information holding circuits is performed while taking into account the actual information interchange time between two dummy information holding circuits

formed in the memory cell array, whereby an information interchange operation can be performed reliably between information holding circuits and it is possible to realize a stable operation without being substantially influenced by the external environmental factors such as the production process variations, the temperature and the voltage.

5 [0053] Furthermore, according to the present invention, when HI data is written to the temporary holding circuit, the gate length of the first NMOS transistor of the second inversion circuit does not need to be set to a large value in order to reduce the saturated current but may be set to a small value, whereby it is possible to reduce the area, and an area overhead is not caused even with advanced minute production processes because it is not necessary to form the first NMOS transistor by serially connecting a plurality of  
10 transistors of a short gate length. In addition, since the first and second NMOS transistors are connected in series, the sub-threshold leak can be reduced by the DIBL effect.

[0054] Moreover, according to the present invention, there is provided a structure with a series of three transistors in which two NMOS transistors in the second inversion circuit and an NMOS transistor of the inversion circuit for the signal of the information-inputting  
15 port section, whereby the leak current of the second inversion circuit is further reduced to 1/10.

[0055] Furthermore, according to the present invention, there are more than one information-inputting port sections, and the number of NMOS transistors provided in the  
20 second inversion circuit is further increased, where they are connected in series, whereby the leak current is further reduced.

[0056] In addition, according to the present invention, it is possible to set, to a low value, the source-drain voltage of an NMOS transistor whose gate potential is at L with a higher probability in the second inversion circuit, whereby it is possible to reduce the gate  
25 leak current.

[0057] Moreover, according to the present invention, it is possible to supply an

appropriate power source voltage to a dummy circuit formed by MOS transistors having predetermined MOS properties and to supply an appropriate power source voltage to another dummy circuit formed by these MOS transistors and other MOS transistors having different MOS properties, whereby the power consumption can be reduced.

5                    Effects of the Invention

[0058]        As described above, with the semiconductor integrated circuit of the present invention, each port section is connected only to an information holding circuit dedicated thereto, whereby it is possible to significantly reduce the number of ports of each information holding circuit. When it is necessary for a port section to read out  
10        information from an information holding circuit other than the information holding circuit dedicated thereto, information of the other information holding circuit can be relocated to the information holding circuit dedicated thereto by an interchange circuit provided in the memory cell array, whereby the information access speed can be kept high and the information can be accessed in a short amount of time. Furthermore, for each group  
15        including a port section and an information holding circuit dedicated to the port section, the power source voltage and the threshold voltage of constituent transistors can be set to appropriate values according to the access frequency (activity rate) of the port section of the group, thereby providing an effect of reducing the power consumption of each group.

[0059]        Furthermore, according to the present invention, the power source voltage for  
20        the information holding circuit of a lower power source voltage can be reduced while ensuring that the information of the information holding circuit of a lower power source voltage can desirably be relocated to the information holding circuit of a higher power source voltage.

[0060]        In addition, according to the present invention, a port section and an  
25        information holding circuit of a higher operating speed are located in an inner portion of the transistor parallel portion that is less influenced by the STI, whereby the high operating

speed and the stability thereof can desirably be ensured.

[0061] In addition, according to the present invention, an information interchange operation between two information holding circuits is performed while taking into account the actual information interchange time between dummy information holding circuits, whereby an information interchange operation can be performed reliably between information holding circuits and it is possible to realize a stable operation without being substantially influenced by the external environmental factors such as the production process variations, the temperature and the voltage.

[0062] In addition, according to the present invention, it is possible to reduce the area of the temporary holding circuit, and it is possible to suppress the occurrence of an area overhead even with advanced minute production processes. Furthermore, the sub-threshold leak can be reduced by the DIBL effect.

[0063] Moreover, according to the present invention, the leak current of the second inversion circuit can be further reduced.

[0064] Furthermore, according to the present invention, appropriate power source voltages can be supplied to dummy circuits of MOS transistors with different predetermined MOS properties, whereby the power consumption can be reduced.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[FIG. 1] FIG. 1 shows a configuration of a semiconductor integrated circuit according to an embodiment of the present invention.

[FIG. 2] FIG. 2 shows an important part of an internal configuration of a register file of the semiconductor integrated circuit.

[FIG. 3] FIG. 3 shows a timing diagram of a data interchange operation in the register file.

[FIG. 4] FIG. 4 shows the relationship between the activity rate, the threshold



voltage and the power source voltage of constituent transistors of write port sections, read port sections, holding circuits and a latch circuit of the semiconductor integrated circuit.

[FIG. 5] FIG. 5 shows an internal configuration of a substrate voltage control circuit provided in the semiconductor integrated circuit.

5 [FIG. 6] FIG. 6 shows an internal configuration of a DLL circuit provided in the semiconductor integrated circuit.

[FIG. 7] FIG. 7 shows a timing diagram of various signals output from the DLL circuit.

10 [FIG. 8] FIG. 8 shows an internal configuration of a delay-voltage conversion circuit provided in the semiconductor integrated circuit.

[FIG. 9] FIG. 9 schematically shows an arrangement of circuit sections operating at a higher speed and those operating at a lower operating speed in a transistor row forming the semiconductor integrated circuit.

15 [FIG. 10] FIG. 10 is a circuit diagram showing an internal configuration of a control circuit provided in the semiconductor integrated circuit, and the details of the production of various control signals taking into account an actual data interchange operation using two dummy circuits.

20 [FIG. 11] FIG. 11 is a circuit diagram showing the details of a data interchange signal producing circuit using a control circuit and two dummy circuits provided in the semiconductor integrated circuit.

[FIG. 12] FIG. 12 shows a timing diagram of a data interchange operation by the data interchange signal producing circuit.

25 [FIG. 13] FIG. 13 shows the relationship between the activity rate, the threshold voltage and the power source voltage of constituent transistors of write port sections, read port sections, holding circuits and a latch circuit of the semiconductor integrated circuit.

[FIG. 14] FIG. 14 shows an important part of an internal configuration of a register file satisfying the relationship shown in FIG. 13.

[FIG. 15] FIG. 15 shows a general schematic configuration of the register file satisfying the relationship shown in FIG. 13.

5 [FIG. 16] FIG. 16 is a circuit diagram showing an internal configuration of a delay-voltage conversion circuit.

[FIG. 17] FIG. 17 shows an operation timing diagram of the delay-voltage conversion circuit.

10 [FIG. 18] FIG. 18 shows a circuit configuration of a 1R/1W memory cell in the register file.

[FIG. 19] FIG. 19 shows a circuit configuration of a 1R/3W memory cell in the register file.

15 [FIG. 20] FIG. 20(a) shows an internal configuration of a processor being a specific application of the semiconductor integrated circuit, and FIG. 20(b) shows thread switching timing of the processor.

[FIG. 21] FIG. 21 shows an internal configuration of another processor being a specific application of the semiconductor integrated circuit.

## DESCRIPTION OF REFERENCE NUMERALS

20 [0066]

	<b>1</b>	Register file
	<b>2A</b>	First functional block
	<b>2B</b>	Second functional block
	<b>5</b>	Memory cell array
25	<b>5a</b>	Regular memory cell group
	<b>5b to 5f</b>	Dummy memory cell group

	<b>6</b>	Read/write circuit
	<b>7</b>	Decoding circuit
	<b>8</b>	Control circuit
	<b>9</b>	Delay-voltage conversion circuit
<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	DLL circuit
	<b>12a to 12c</b>	Power source voltage control circuit
	<b>13a to 13c</b>	Substrate voltage control circuit
	<b>20A</b>	First holding circuit (first information holding circuit)
	<b>20AD1, 20AD2</b>	First dummy holding circuit
<b>10</b>		(first dummy information holding circuit)
	<b>30BD1, 30BD2</b>	Second dummy holding circuit
		(second dummy information holding circuit)
	<b>21AW</b>	First write port section
	<b>21AR1, 21AR2</b>	First read port section
<b>15</b>	<b>30B</b>	Second holding circuit (second information holding circuit)
	<b>31AW</b>	Second write port section
	<b>31AR</b>	Second read port section
	<b>40</b>	Latch circuit (temporary holding circuit)
	<b>41, 42</b>	Transfer circuit
<b>20</b>	<b>43</b>	Interchange circuit
	<b>61</b>	Transistor row
	<b>70</b>	Detection circuit
	<b>71</b>	Control signal producing circuit
	<b>16B</b>	MCA dummy circuit (second dummy circuit)
<b>25</b>	<b>16C</b>	MCB dummy circuit (first dummy circuit)
	<b>B1L, C1M</b>	Power source control circuit

(power source voltage adjustment circuit and power source voltage supply circuit)

## BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

5 [0067] A semiconductor integrated circuit according to an embodiment of the present invention will now be described with reference to the drawings.

[0068] First Embodiment

FIG. 1 shows a general configuration of a semiconductor integrated circuit according to a first embodiment of the present invention.

10 [0069] In the figure, reference numeral 1 denotes a register file, and reference numerals 2A and 2B each denote a functional block. The register file 1 is of a 2W3R port type where the number of write ports is 2 and the number of read ports is 3. One functional block 2A is of a 1W2R port type where the number of write ports is 1 and the number of read ports is 2, and the other functional block 2B is of a 1W1R port type where  
15 the number of write ports and the number of read ports are both 1. Therefore, the register file 1 and one functional block 2A are connected to one write data line A-W1 and two read data lines A-R1 and A-R2, whereas the register file 1 and the other functional block 2B are each connected to one write data line B-W1 and one read data line B-R1.

[0070] The register file 1 includes a memory cell array 5, a write/read circuit 6, a decoding circuit 7, a control circuit 8, a delay-voltage conversion circuit 9 and a DLL circuit 10. Moreover, the memory cell array 5 includes a regular memory cell group 5a and five dummy memory cell groups 5b to 5f. These dummy memory cell groups 5b to 5f have the same bit line shape, word line shape and memory cell shape as those of the regular memory cell group 5a. The write/read circuit 6 is connected to the two functional  
20 blocks 2A and 2B via the two write data lines A-W1 and B-W1 and the three read data lines A-R1, A-R2 and B-R1. The control circuit 8 receives an address signal, a read

enable signal and a write enable signal for writing/reading data to/from the two functional blocks **2A** and **2B**, and the DLL circuit **10** receives a clock signal.

[0071] The semiconductor integrated circuit shown in FIG. 1 further includes three power source voltage control circuits **12a**, **12b** and **12c** and three substrate voltage control circuits **13a**, **13b** and **13c**, the details of which will be described later.

[0072] FIG. 2 shows the details of the structure for writing/reading data (information) to/from the regular memory cell group **5a**. In the figure, reference numeral **20A** denotes a first holding circuit (first information holding circuit) dedicated to the 1W2R-type functional block **2A**, reference numeral **30B** denotes a second holding circuit (second information holding circuit) dedicated to the other 1W1R-type functional block **2B**, which each include two inverter circuits **I1** and **I2**. The first holding circuit **20A** is connected to one first write port section (information-inputting first port section) **21AW** and two first read port sections (information-outputting first port section) **21AR1** and **21AR2**, which are dedicated to the 1W2R-type functional block **2A**. The first write port section **21AW** includes one P-type transistor **Tr1** and one N-type transistor **Tr2**, and is connected to the functional block **2A** via the write data line **A-W1**. Each of the two read port sections **21AR1** and **21AR2** includes two N-type transistors **Tr3** and **Tr4**, and is connected to the functional block **2A** via the read data lines **A-R1** and **A-R2**. The gate of the N-type transistor **Tr2** of the write port section **21AW** is connected to a data write word line **WLWA**, and the gate of the N-type transistor **Tr4** of each read port section **21AR1**, **21AR2** is connected to a data read word line **WLRA1**, **WLRA2**.

[0073] Similarly, the second holding circuit **30B** is connected to one second write port section (information-inputting second port section) **31AW** and one second read port section (information-outputting second port section) **31AR**, which are dedicated to the 1W1R-type functional block **2B**. Similarly to the first write port section **21AW**, the second write port section **31AW** includes one P-type transistor **Tr1** and one N-type

transistor **Tr2**, and is connected to the functional block **2B** via the write data line **B-W1**. Similarly to the read port section **21AR1**, the read port section **31AR** includes two N-type transistors **Tr3** and **Tr4**, and is connected to the functional block **2B** via the read data line **B-R1**. The gate of the N-type transistor **Tr2** of the write port section **31AW** is connected to a data write word line **WLWB**, and the gate of the N-type transistor **Tr4** of each read port section **31AR** is connected to a data read word line **WLRB**.

[0074] Moreover, in FIG. 2, reference numeral **40** denotes a latch circuit (temporary holding circuit) being a differential circuit including four P-type transistors **Tr5** to **Tr8** and three N-type transistors **Tr9** to **Tr11**. Reference numerals **41** and **42** each denote a transfer circuit including four N-type transistors **Tr12** to **Tr15**, **Tr16** to **Tr19**. The latch circuit **40** is connected to the second holding circuit **30B** dedicated to the second functional block **2B**, and latches the data held in the second holding circuit **30B** when the gate of the N-type transistor **Tr11** provided therein receives an H-level control signal **B->LEN**. One transfer circuit **41** is connected to the latch circuit **40** and the first holding circuit **20A**, and transfers the data latched in the latch circuit **40** to the first holding circuit **20A** when the gates of the two N-type transistors **Tr13** and **Tr15** receive a control signal **L->AEN**. Moreover, the other transfer circuit **42** is connected to the first holding circuit **20A** and the second holding circuit **30B**, and transfers the data latched in the first holding circuit **20A** to the second holding circuit **30B** when the gates of the two N-type transistors **Tr17** and **Tr19** receive a control signal **A->BEN**. Therefore, the latch circuit **40** and the two transfer circuits **41** and **42** together form an interchange circuit **43** for interchanging data between the first and second holding circuits **20A** and **30B**.

[0075] FIG. 3 shows a timing diagram of a data interchange sequence by the interchange circuit **43**. In the figure, first, the control signal **B->L EN** is enabled, in response to which the latch circuit **40** latches the data held in the second holding circuit **30B**. Then, the control signal **A->BEN** is enabled, and the data held in the first holding

circuit **20A** is transferred to the second holding circuit **30B**. Then, after the data of the first holding circuit **20A** is stored in the second holding circuit **30B**, the control signal A->BEN is disabled. Then, the control signal L->AEN is enabled, and the data of the second holding circuit **30B** being latched in the latch circuit **40** is transferred to the first holding circuit **20A**. Then, the control signal B->LEN and the control signal L->AEN become disabled, thus completing the data interchange operation between the first and second holding circuits **20A** and **30B**.

[0076] As can be seen from FIG. 1 and FIG. 2, since the first holding circuit **20A** is basically dedicated to the 1W2R first functional block **2A**, and the second holding circuit **30B** is basically dedicated to the 1W1R second functional block **2B**, the first holding circuit **20A** is only connected to the one write port section **21AW** and the two read port sections **21AR1** and **21AR2** of the 1W2R first functional block **2A**, and the second holding circuit **30B** is only connected to the one write port section **31BW** and the one read port section **31BR** of the 1W1R second functional block **2B**. Conventionally, it is necessary to provide, for each of the holding circuits **20A** and **30B**, the same number of ports as the total number of ports (2W3R) (=5) of the two functional blocks **2A** and **2B**. In contrast, in the present embodiment, the number of ports of the semiconductor integrated circuit as a whole can be reduced by half, whereby it is possible to effectively reduce the area of the register file 1.

[0077] Moreover, if, for example, there is a need to interchange data between the holding circuits **20A** and **30B** after the first functional block **2A** reads/writes data from/to the first holding circuit **20A** dedicated thereto and the second functional block **2B** reads/writes data from/to the second holding circuit **30B** dedicated thereto, the data interchange operation is performed between the first and second holding circuits **20A** and **30B** via the latch circuit **40** in the memory cell array 5. Where the data interchange operation is performed by, for example, providing an external save register connected to

the register file **1** via a data bus, the operation takes, as interchange time, the same number of periods as the number of entries of the register file **1**. In contrast, the operation is completed in only one period in the present embodiment.

[0078] Thus, the register file **1** of the present embodiment has a small area and is yet capable of providing high-speed data write/read performance.

[0079] Moreover, in FIG. 2, since the latch circuit **40** is a differential circuit as shown in FIG. 2, the data held in the second holding circuit **30B** can desirably be latched in the latch circuit **40** even if the second holding circuit **30B** is a circuit that operates at a low power source voltage. Therefore, if the second write port section **31BW** and the read port section **31BR** dedicated to the second functional block **2B** have a low activity rate (access frequency), or if the access speed of these port sections **31BW** and **31BR** may be lower than those of other port sections, the power source voltage for the second holding circuit **30B** can be further lowered, whereby it is possible to further reduce the power consumption.

[0080] FIG. 4 shows the relationship between the activity rate (access frequency), the threshold voltage of constituent transistors and the power source voltage supplied to the constituent transistors of the write/read port sections **21AW**, **21AR1**, **21AR2**, **31BW** and **31BR**, the holding circuits **20A** and **30B** and the latch circuit **40**.

[0081] In the figure, the activity rate (access frequency), the threshold voltage of constituent transistors and the power source voltage supplied to the constituent transistors differ among a first group including the first write and read port sections **21AW**, **21AR1** and **21AR2** and the first holding circuit **20A**, a second group including the second write and read port sections **31AW** and **31AR** and the second holding circuit **30B**, and a third group including the latch circuit **40**. Specifically, the first group has a higher activity rate than the second and third groups, according to which the threshold voltage of constituent transistors is set to be lower and the supplied power source voltage is set to be higher. On



the other hand, for the third group with the lowest activity rate, the threshold voltage of constituent transistors is set to be highest, and the supplied power source voltage is set to be lowest. For the second group with an intermediate activity rate, the threshold voltage of constituent transistors and the supplied power source voltage are set to values that are  
5 between those of the first group and those of the third group.

[0082] Thus, if a transistor has a high activity rate (access frequency), the power consumption can be reduced by lowering the threshold voltage of the transistor, and a predetermined operating speed can be ensured by setting the power source voltage for the transistor so that the operating speed of the transistor under the threshold voltage satisfies a  
10 predetermined speed. As described above, for each group, the threshold voltage of constituent transistors and the supplied power source voltage are set according to the activity rate of the group, whereby it is possible, for each group, to effectively reduce the leak current from constituent transistors, thereby reducing the power consumption, while ensuring a predetermined operating speed.

[0083] Note that constituent transistors of each of the port sections and the holding circuits of the memory cell array 5 have a substrate separate from the substrate of other port sections and holding circuits, whereby the threshold voltage thereof can be set independently. By forming the port sections and the holding circuits with transistors of different threshold voltages in the first place, it is possible to more effectively reduce the  
15 power consumption.

[0084] Moreover, if the write or read access speed of a port section differs from that of another port section depending on the required specifications, constituent transistors of different transistor widths may be produced in these port sections in the first place, thereby more effectively reducing the power consumption.

[0085] The threshold voltage of constituent transistors and the supplied power source voltage of each group shown in FIG. 4 are controlled to the predetermined value by a total  
25

of three substrate voltage control circuits **13a** to **13c** and a total of three power source voltage control circuits **12a** to **12c**, which are separately provided for the groups as shown in FIG. 1.

[0086] FIG. 5 shows an example of an internal configuration of the substrate voltage control circuit **13a**. The other substrate voltage control circuits **13b** and **13b** have the same configuration. The substrate voltage control circuit **13a** shown in the figure is a circuit for maintaining the threshold voltage of transistors at the predetermined value, and has an output terminal **BN** connected to the substrate of the N-type transistors of the port sections and the holding circuits of the first group. The internal configuration of the substrate voltage control circuit **13a** shown in FIG. 5 will now be described.

[0087] In FIG. 5, the substrate voltage control circuit **13a** includes N-type transistors **Trn** for monitoring the threshold voltage. The N-type transistors **Trn** are transistors produced in the same production step as the N-type transistors in the regular memory cell group **5a** in the register file **1**. A constant current is supplied to the N-type transistors **Trn** from a constant current source **80**. The constant current source **80** is formed by a circuit with no temperature dependence, e.g., a bandgap reference circuit, or the like, which exhibits a constant current property, which supplies a constant current of a current value equal to the saturated current value flowing through the N-type transistors under the power source voltage supplied to the N-type transistors in the regular memory cell group **5a** and under the predetermined threshold voltage of the N-type transistors. The monitoring N-type transistors **Trn** perform a current-voltage conversion on the constant current from the constant current source **80**, and the converted voltage (drain voltage) **Vd** is input to a 2-input comparison section **81**.

[0088] The comparison section **81** is formed by a differential amplifier, or the like, and receives the converted voltage **Vd** from the monitoring N-type transistors **Trn** at one input terminal thereof, and receives the power source voltage **VREF** to the N-type

transistors of the object to be controlled by the substrate voltage control circuit **13a**, e.g., the first write/read port sections **21AW**, **21AR1** and **21AR2** and the first holding circuit **20A** at the other input terminal thereof. The output side of the comparison section **81** is connected to the output terminal **BN** via a voltage limiting section **82** and is connected to the substrate of the monitoring N-type transistors **Trn**. The comparison section **81** controls the substrate voltage of the monitoring N-type transistors **Trn** so that the input voltages  $V_d$  and  $V_{REF}$  are equal to each other. The controlled substrate voltage is output through the output terminal **BN**, and is used as the substrate voltage of the N-type transistors of the port sections and the holding circuits of the first group. Note that the voltage limiting section **82** restricts the upper limit and the lower limit of the output voltage from the output terminal **BN** to a predetermined upper limit voltage  $V_U$  and a predetermined lower limit voltage  $V_L$ .

[0089] Therefore, the substrate voltage control circuit **13a** shown in FIG. 5 maintains and controls, under the supplied power source voltage  $V_{REF}$ , the actual saturated current of the N-type transistors of the object to be controlled at a constant value, thereby maintaining the threshold voltage of the N-type transistors of the object to be controlled to a predetermined threshold voltage value. Note that while FIG. 5 shows a configuration for maintaining and controlling the substrate voltage of the N-type transistors in the regular memory cell group **5a** at a predetermined value, the substrate voltage of P-type transistors can also be maintained and controlled at a predetermined value by using a similar configuration, which will not be described herein.

[0090] Each of the power source voltage control circuits **12a** to **12c** shown in FIG. 1 basically functions to control the power source voltage of the group to which it belongs at the predetermined power source voltage value shown in FIG. 4, and adjusts the value of the produced power source voltage by receiving a control signal from the delay-voltage conversion circuit **9** as shown in FIG. 1. For each of the first to third groups, if the

operation delay varies due to a temperature variation during operation, the delay-voltage conversion circuit 9 and the DLL circuit 10 shown in FIG. 1 converts the delay variation to a voltage variation, and adjusts the power source voltage to be produced by one of the power source voltage control circuits 12a to 12c of that group with a control signal whose content is the voltage variation so as to prevent the operating speed of that group from being influenced by temperature variations.

[0091] FIG. 6 shows an internal configuration of the DLL circuit 10 shown in FIG. 1. FIG. 8 shows an example of an internal configuration of the delay-voltage conversion circuit 9 shown in FIG. 1. The DLL circuit 10 of FIG. 6 produces a reference value for the operation delay of the read ports, the write ports and the interchange circuit 43. Specifically, the DLL circuit 10 includes a voltage control delay circuit 50 including four buffers 50a to 50d connected in series with one another, a comparator 51 for receiving and comparing the output from the voltage control delay circuit 50 and a predetermined clock signal CL, and a charge pump 52 for receiving the output from the comparator 51 to charge a capacitor C therewith, wherein the charge state of the capacitor C is fed back to the four buffers 50a to 50d. The output signal from the first buffer 50a of the voltage control delay circuit 50 is output through an output terminal 53a as the delayed clock for the dummy read port section, the output signal from the second buffer 50b is output through an output terminal 53b as the delayed clock for the dummy write port section, and the output signal from the third buffer 50c is output through an output terminal 53c as the dummy interchanging delayed clock. The relationship between these delayed clocks and the predetermined clock signal is shown in FIG. 7. The three delayed clocks are tuned in advance to the access budget of the register file 1.

[0092] The delay-voltage conversion circuit 9 shown in FIG. 8 operates by receiving the three delayed clocks from the DLL circuit 10. The delay-voltage conversion circuit 9 includes a dummy read port section 9a, a dummy write port section 9b and a dummy

interchanging circuit **9c**, which are formed in one of the dummy memory cell groups **5b** to **5f** shown in FIG. 1. These dummy port sections and the dummy interchanging circuit have the same configurations as those of the port sections **21AW**, ..., and the interchange circuit **43** formed in the regular memory cell group **5a**. Moreover, the delay-voltage conversion circuit **9** is provided with a total of three comparators **9d** to **9f** and a total of three counters **9g** to **9i** corresponding to the dummy port sections and the dummy interchanging circuit.

[0093] The delay-voltage conversion circuit **9** compares, at the comparator **9d**, the output signal from the dummy read port section **9a** operating with a predetermined clock signal with the delayed clock for the dummy read port section (reference delayed clock) from the DLL circuit **10** and, if the delay (read time) of the dummy read port section **9a** is greater, increments the counter circuit **9g** with the output from the comparator **9d**, thus adjusting the control signal so as to increase the power source voltage value of the power source voltage control circuit **12a** for the first group. Similarly, the circuit compares, at the comparator **9e**, the output signal from the dummy write port section **9b** operating with the delayed clock for the dummy read port section received from the DLL circuit **10** with the delayed clock for the dummy write port section (reference delayed clock) from the DLL circuit **10** and, if the delay (write time) of the dummy write port section **9b** is greater, increments the counter circuit **9h** with the output from the comparator **9e**, thus adjusting the control signal so as to increase the power source voltage value of the power source voltage control circuit **12b** for the second group. Moreover, the circuit compares, at the comparator **9f**, the output signal from the dummy interchanging circuit **9c** operating with the delayed clock for the dummy write port section received from the DLL circuit **10** with the dummy interchanging delayed clock (reference delayed clock) from the DLL circuit **10** and, if the delay of the dummy interchanging circuit **9c** is greater, increments the counter circuit **9i** with the output from the comparator **9f**, thus adjusting the control signal so as to

increase the power source voltage value of the power source voltage control circuit **12c** for the third group.

[0094] Therefore, using the DLL circuit **10** of FIG. **6** and the delay-voltage conversion circuit **9** of FIG. **8**, even if the operation delay of the dummy read/write port sections **9a** and **9b** and the dummy interchanging circuit **9c** varies due to a temperature variation, the power source voltage to be supplied is accordingly adjusted by the power source voltage control circuits **12a** to **12c**, whereby the operation delay of the regular read/write port sections **21AW**, ..., and the regular interchange circuit **43**, with a similar delay to that of the dummy circuits **9a** and **9c**, can be maintained at a substantially constant value despite temperature variations.

[0095] FIG. **9** is a schematic diagram showing a layout of many transistors with which the write/read port sections **21AW**, **31BR**, ..., and the holding circuits **20A** and **30B** are produced. In the figure, a transistor row **61** for forming the port sections and the holding circuits is formed on an N-type substrate **60**. Transistors located along an edge portion of the transistor row **61** are used to form port sections and holding circuits of a relatively low operating speed, and transistors located in an inner portion of the transistor row **61** are used to form port sections and holding circuits of a relatively high operating speed. With this configuration, a device separation region (STI) **65** is placed on the N-type substrate **60** between the transistor row **61** and each of other transistor rows **62** and **63** on the left and right of the transistor row **61**, and transistors along an edge portion of the transistor row **61** have a greater degree of deterioration due to the influence of the STI. However, the deterioration has little influence because port sections and holding circuits of a low operating speed are arranged in this portion. On the other hand, port sections and holding circuits of a high operating speed are formed by transistors that are located in an inner portion of the transistor row **61** and are thus less influenced by the STI, whereby it is possible to desirably ensure the high operating speed.

[0096] FIG. 10 is a configuration for reliably performing a data interchange operation between the two holding circuits 20A and 30B in the regular memory cell group 5a by using the results of an actual data interchange operation using a plurality of dummy holding circuits in the dummy memory cell group 5d.

5 [0097] In the figure, two circuits 5d1 and 5d2 equivalent to the circuit shown in FIG. 2 in the dummy memory cell group 5d are used, and the control circuit 8 includes a detection circuit 70 for detecting when a data interchange operation is needed, and a control signal producing circuit 71 receiving the output signal from the detection circuit 70 to produce six data interchange control signals (interchange control signals) B->LEN\_D,  
10 B->LEN, A->BEN\_D, A->BEN, L->AEN\_D and L->AEN.

[0098] The two dummy circuits 5d1 and 5d2 have similar basic configurations to that of the circuit of FIG. 2, and therefore like elements thereof to those of FIG. 2 are denoted by like reference numerals followed by D1 and D2, respectively, and will not be further described below. The dummy circuit 5d1 is for detecting the amount of time required for  
15 a data interchange operation from a first dummy holding circuit (first dummy information holding circuit) 20AD1 to a second dummy holding circuit (second dummy information holding circuit) 30BD1, and the other dummy circuit 5d2 is for detecting the amount of time required for a data interchange operation from a dummy latch circuit 40D2 to a first dummy holding circuit 20AD2. In the first dummy circuit 5d1, a first read port section  
20 21AR2D1 and a second read port section 31BRD1 are connected to the control signal producing circuit 71. On the other hand, in the second dummy circuit 5d2, a first read port section 21AR1D2 is connected to the control signal producing circuit 71.

[0099] When the detection circuit 70 receives a bank select signal and the accessed bank is switched from one bank to another, i.e., after data that should be held in the first  
25 and second holding circuits 20A and 30B are held therein, the detection circuit 70 detects a potential variation in the bank select signal and determines that a data interchange

operation is needed, thereby outputting a detection signal.

[0100] Moreover, the control signal producing circuit **71** operates as follows. For example, in an initial state, in the dummy circuit **5d1**, "1" data is stored in the first dummy holding circuit **20AD1**, and "0" data is stored both in the second dummy holding circuit **30BD1** and in a dummy latch circuit **40D1**, whereas in the other dummy circuit **5d2**, "0" data is stored in the first dummy holding circuit **20AD2** and "1" data is stored both in a second dummy holding circuit **30BD2** and in the dummy latch circuit **40D2**.

[0101] Then, after the initial state, when a data interchange operation is needed, i.e., when a detection signal is received from the detection circuit **70**, the control signal producing circuit **71** outputs to the dummy circuit **5d1** a control signal A->BEN\_D for enabling a data interchange operation from the first dummy holding circuit **20AD1** to the second dummy holding circuit **30BD1** and, with a predetermined time delay, outputs to the regular circuit of FIG. 2 a control signal A->BEN for enabling a data interchange operation from the first holding circuit **20A** to the second holding circuit **30B**. Then, when the data of the first dummy holding circuit **20AD1** is relocated to the second dummy holding circuit **30BD1** of the dummy circuit **5d1** and the data "1" is actually read out from the read port section **31BRD1**, the circuit stops outputting the control signals A->BEN\_D and A->BEN with a predetermined time delay therebetween. Then, the circuit outputs to the other dummy circuit **5d2** a control signal L->AEN\_D for enabling a data interchange operation from the dummy latch circuit **40D2** to the first dummy holding circuit **20AD2** and, with a predetermined time delay, outputs to the regular circuit of FIG. 2 a control signal L->AEN for enabling a data interchange operation from the latch circuit **40** to the first holding circuit **20A**.

[0102] Then, when the data "1" of the dummy latch circuit **40D2** is transferred to the first dummy holding circuit **20AD2** in the other dummy circuit **5d2** and is read out from the read port section **21ARD2**, the control signal producing circuit **71** stops outputting the



control signals L->AEN\_D and L->AEN with a predetermined time delay therebetween.

[0103] A data interchange operation between the two holding circuits **20A** and **30B** in the regular circuit of FIG. 2 is performed while taking into account the actual interchange time obtained by actually performing a data interchange operation with the dummy circuits **5d1** and **5d2** by the detection circuit **70** and the control signal producing circuit **71** provided in the control circuit **8**. Therefore, it is possible to reliably perform a data interchange operation in the regular circuit and to stop outputting the control signals B->LEN, A->BEN and L->AEN after the completion of the data interchange operation.

[0104] (Variation Of Configuration For Controlling Data Interchange Operation Using Dummy Holding Circuit)

FIG. 11 shows a variation of a circuit for producing the six data interchange control signals (interchange control signals) B->LEN\_D, B->LEN, A->BEN\_D, A->BEN, L->AEN\_D and L->AEN when forming a circuit for detecting the completion of a write operation at a dummy circuit after reading out data of the register file and completing a data interchange operation between two memory cells. The circuit corresponds to the circuits **5d1** and **5d2** equivalent to the circuit shown in FIG. 2 in the dummy memory cell group **5d** and the control signal producing circuit **71** shown in FIG. 10.

[0105] The circuit shown in FIG. 11 also uses two dummy circuits **Rep1** and **Rep2** as described above with reference to FIG. 10. The configuration of FIG. 10 interchanges data on write bit lines and completes the write operation with one write port, after which the state is brought back to the initial state. In contrast, in the two dummy circuits **Rep1** and **Rep2** shown in FIG. 11, bit lines connected to two write ports are set to a fixed potential in advance, and the completion of a write operation is detected with a write control signal WWL and an inverted signal /WWL thereof, after which the information of the holding circuits are brought back to the initial state. Note that although each element denoted by reference numeral **11A** in FIG. 11 is schematically represented by a switch

symbol, it is actually a MOS transistor, and is turned ON/OFF by a control signal whose name is shown near the reference numeral.

[0106] FIG. 12 shows a timing diagram at each node in FIG. 11. With reference to FIG. 12, the configuration and the operation of the circuit of FIG. 11 will be described.

5 [0107] After a clock signal CLK of the register file rises, a control signal RWL of a read port of the register file is enabled, and a node **DW** of a dynamic circuit **DC1** (a circuit equivalent to the control signal producing circuit 71 in FIG. 10) is precharged. Then, when the read control signal RWL is disabled, the write control signal WWL and the inverted signal of the interchange control signal B->L are enabled, and a node **DBA** of a  
10 dynamic circuit **DC3** is precharged. As the write control signal WWL is enabled, the node **DW** of the dynamic circuit **DC1** is discharged, the write control signal WWL and the inverted signal of the interchange control signal B->L are disabled, the interchange control signal A->B is enabled, and a node **DCB** of a dynamic circuit **DC2** is precharged. Moreover, as the interchange control signal A->B is enabled, the node **DBA** of the  
15 dynamic circuit **DC3** is discharged. Then, when the interchange control signal A->B is disabled and the interchange control signal L->A is enabled, the node **DCB** of the dynamic circuit **DC2** is discharged, and the interchange control signal L->A is disabled, thus completing a write detection operation and an information interchange operation between two holding circuits.

20 [0108] The circuit shown in FIG. 11 is advantageous where there are multiple write ports, and the area can be reduced because write bit lines do not need to be transitioned. Note that while a read operation (Read), a write operation (Write) and an interchange operation (Copy) are completed within one cycle of the clock signal CLK in the timing diagram of FIG. 12, it is understood that the read operation (Read) and the write operation  
25 (Write) may be completed within one cycle of the clock signal while completing the interchange operation (Copy) in the second cycle. Although a 1-cycle latency occurs for

the interchange operation, this causes little deterioration in performance in applications such as a multi-thread processor to be described later.

[0109] (Alternative Example Of Power Source Voltage Control)

FIG. 13 shows another example of how to control the activity rate (access frequency), the threshold voltage and the power source voltage of port sections, holding circuits and a latch circuit as shown in FIG. 4. FIG. 13 shows an example where the register file includes a 7R5W memory cell **MCA**, a 1R1W memory cell **MCB** and an interchange circuit (latch circuit) for interchanging data between these two memory cells **MCA** and **MCB**, and where the parameters are controlled so that the memory cells **MCA** and **MCB** operate at a substantially constant speed. The threshold voltages and the power source voltages in the figure are target values where there is no production process variations and the temperature conditions are optimal.

[0110] Normally, in a register file, even if the activity rate (access frequency) varies from one port to another, the ports are controlled to be at a constant access speed so as to satisfy the operation specifications thereof. Where an interchange circuit, which is a characteristic element of the present invention, is added, the interchange circuit is also controlled to be at the substantially constant access speed. Generally, if the threshold voltage of a MOS transistor is increased according to the activity rate in order to reduce the power consumption, the access speed thereof will be lowered. Therefore, the power source voltage is set at a higher level in order to compensate for the access speed. While the power source voltage is set at a lower level as the activity rate is lower in FIG. 4 because the primary object is to reduce the power consumption, it is necessary to increase the power source voltage as the access frequency is lower in order to achieve a substantially constant access speed. Nevertheless, a further reduction in power consumption can be made. For example, with a 90 nm CMOS transistor, the leak current can be reduced to 1/1000 or less if the threshold voltage is higher than 200 mV by about

200 mV, and the leak current ratio between where the power source voltage is 0.8 V and where it is 1 V is only 1/4. Thus, as a whole, the leak current can be reduced to 1/250 from that when the threshold voltage is set at a low level. The reason why the threshold voltage and the power source voltage value of the interchange circuit are set to the same values as those of one memory cell **MCB** in FIG. 13 will be stated later.

[0111] FIG. 14(a) shows a circuit diagram where the threshold voltage is optimized based on the settings of the various parameters such as the activity rate and the threshold voltage shown in FIG. 13 and in order to reduce the area, production variations and temperature variations of the memory cells **MCA** and **MCB**.

[0112] In FIG. 14(a), the constituent PMOS transistors of the 7R/5W memory cell **MCA**, the 1R/1W memory cell **MCB** and an interchange circuit (latch circuit) **L1** are commonly set at a threshold voltage, and the constituent NMOS transistors are produced with a low threshold voltage and a high threshold voltage in their production process steps so that only the threshold voltage of the constituent NMOS transistors are different between the memory cells **MCA** and **MCB**. The threshold voltages can be set by varying the concentration at each junction or the material or thickness of the gate oxide film.

[0113] Moreover, a substrate voltage for adjusting the threshold voltage  $V_t$  of the NMOS transistors at a constant value despite temperature variations and production process variations is supplied from a substrate voltage producing circuit (not shown) to the substrate of the memory cells **MCA** and **MCB** and the constituent NMOS transistors of the interchange circuit **L1**. FIG. 14(b) shows a cross section of the physical structure.

[0114] In FIG. 14(b), for the left-side NMOS transistor of the memory cell **MCA** having a low threshold voltage  $LV_t$ , a substrate voltage  $V_{BN}$  is supplied to **PWELL** from the substrate voltage producing circuit, as shown also in FIG. 14(d) and FIG. 14(f). For the right-side NMOS transistor of the memory cell **MCB** and the interchange circuit **L1** having a high threshold value  $HV_t$ , a substrate voltage of  $V_{BNC}$  is supplied to **PWELL1**

from the substrate voltage producing circuit, as shown also in FIG. 14(c) and FIG. 14(e). For the center PMOS transistor in FIG. 14(b), a substrate voltage VBP is supplied to NWELL. Thus, even if the activity rate somewhat varies from one circuit to another, it is possible to reduce the area by sharing the threshold voltage and the power source voltage while taking into consideration the physical arrangement. Specifically, although the memory cell **MCB** and the interchange circuit **L1** have different activity rates, they share a common feature of having a sufficiently low activity rate and therefore share the same threshold voltage and the same power source voltage, thus minimizing the increase in area due to substrate separation.

[0115] Also with the PMOS transistors, it is possible to reduce the area by sharing the same threshold voltage and the same power source voltage. This is for the following reason. Also with PMOS transistors, it will be necessary to separately provide NWELLs of the PMOS transistors when differently setting the threshold voltages between two memory cells **MCA** and **MCB** of different access frequencies, and supplying different power source voltages to the substrates of the PMOS transistors from the substrate voltage producing circuit so that a constant threshold voltage  $V_t$  can be set despite temperature variations and process variations. Between the NWELL separation width and the PWELL separation width, the separation width is typically greater for the well with a deeper common well. Therefore, in this case, the overhead with NWELL separation is greater than that with PWELL separation. For example, they are 2  $\mu\text{m}$  and 1  $\mu\text{m}$ , respectively, for the 90-nm CMOS generation.

[0116] Moreover, in FIG. 14(a), the power source voltage of the memory cell **MCB** is set to a higher level than the memory cell **MCA**, and the power source voltage of the interchange circuit **L1** is set to the same voltage value as the power source voltage of the memory cell **MCB**. With such a configuration, a data interchange operation is performed by first passing data from one memory cell **MCB** to the interchange circuit **L1**, then

passing data from the other memory cell **MCA** to the memory cell **MCB**, and finally passing data from the interchange circuit **L1** to the other memory cell **MCA**. This has an effect of suppressing the through current. The reason will be stated in detail below.

[0117] If the power source voltage of a write port of the memory cell **MCB** is lower than the power source voltage of the interchange circuit **L1** and the node at the connection point between the write port of the memory cell **MCB** and the holding circuit is at Hi, the voltage value at the node is equal to the power source voltage of the interchange circuit **L1**. However, since the power source voltage of the write port of the memory cell **MCB** is a low voltage, the voltage at the node may possibly be higher than the power source voltage of the write port of the memory cell **MCB**. Then, even if the potential of the bit line connected to that write port is L, the gate voltage of the constituent PMOS transistors of the transfer gates forming the write port may possibly be lower than the power source voltage of the connection node between the write port and the holding circuit of the memory cell **MCB** by the threshold voltage of the PMOS transistors. Then, the constituent PMOS transistors of the transfer gates forming the write port will be ON. Thus, a through current may possibly flow from the connection node between the write port and the holding circuit of the memory cell **MCB** to the write bit line. However, if the power source voltage of the memory cell **MCB** is set to be greater than or equal to the power source voltage of the interchange circuit **L1** as with the configuration shown in FIG. 14(a), the gate voltage of the constituent PMOS transistors of the transfer gates forming the write port will not be lower than the power source voltage of the connection node between the write port and the holding circuit of the memory cell **MCB** by the threshold voltage of the PMOS transistors, and thus no through current flows.

[0118] Next, FIG. 15 shows the physical layout of a register file using a substrate voltage supply circuit and a power source voltage supply circuit in which memory cells of FIG. 14 are used. The register file performs a read operation and a write operation after

the completion of the read operation within one cycle, and then performs an interchange operation between one memory cell **MCA** and the other memory cell **MCB**. Comparators **15D** and **15E** and counters **15B** and **15C** shown in FIG. 15 correspond to the delay-voltage conversion circuit 9 shown in FIG. 1, and a configuration using these elements in combination with dummy memory cells **1J** is shown in FIG. 16. Note that the loss with respect to the supply of the power source voltage does not substantially differ whether power source control circuits **B1L** and **C1M** and substrate voltage producing circuits **B1P** and **C1P** are provided inside or outside the register file in FIG. 15. Therefore, when a similar power source voltage is given to other semiconductor integrated circuit blocks, these power source control circuits are shared outside the register file, and when it is not given to the outside, placing them inside the register is efficient area-wise as there is less area overhead such as wire routing.

[0119] With reference to FIG. 16, the details of the present voltage control configuration will be further described. In a delay-voltage conversion circuit **16A** shown in FIG. 16, an **MCB** dummy circuit (first dummy circuit) **16C** and an **MCA** dummy circuit (second dummy circuit) **16B** are located in the dummy memory cell group **1J** of FIG. 15. In the **MCA** dummy circuit **16B**, there are a read detection circuit **90** for detecting a data read operation from the memory cell **MCA**, a write detection circuit **91** for detecting a write operation, and an interchange detection circuit **16D**. The read detection circuit **90** operates by receiving a clock signal, the write detection circuit **91** operates by receiving a read detection signal output from the read detection circuit **90**, and the interchange detection circuit **16D** operates by receiving a write detection signal output from the write detection circuit **91**. The basic configuration of the read detection circuit **90**, the write detection circuit **91** and the interchange detection circuit **16D** is similar to the circuit configuration of FIG. 10 and FIG. 11, and includes dummy memory cells and dynamic circuits. Those skilled in the art can design the circuits based on FIG. 10 and FIG. 11.

[0120] Since the write port section, the read port section and the holding circuit of the memory cell **MCA** are all formed by NMOS transistors of a low threshold voltage **LVt**, the MCA dummy circuit **16B** is designed with similar NMOS transistors of a low threshold voltage **LVt**. The interchange detection circuit **16D** is formed by NMOS transistors of a high threshold voltage **HVt**, as is the interchange circuit (latch circuit) shown in FIG. 13.

[0121] Therefore, the MCA dummy circuit **16B** outputs an output signal after a series of operations, i.e., a data read operation from memory when the clock signal is input to the read detection circuit **90**, a data write operation to memory, and a data interchange operation. The comparator **15D** compares the delayed phase of the output signal from the MCA dummy circuit **16B** with the reference clock being the operation clock of the register file, and outputs the result to the counter circuit **15B**. The counter circuit **15B** is incremented if the output signal from the interchange detection circuit **16D** is behind the reference clock, and is decremented if the output signal from the interchange detection circuit **16D** is ahead of the reference clock. The count of the counter circuit **15B** is output to the power source control circuit (the power source voltage adjustment circuit and the power source voltage supply circuit) **C1M**. The power source control circuit **C1M** operates to increase the power source voltage if the counter is incremented, and to decrease the power source voltage if the counter is decremented. While the basic configuration and operation of the other MCB dummy circuit **16C** are similar to those of the MCA dummy circuit **16B**, a read detection circuit **92** and a write detection circuit **93** are configured to use a high threshold voltage **HVt**.

[0122] FIG. 17 shows a timing diagram of the circuit of FIG. 16 as described above. The operation will now be described with reference to FIGs. 15 to 17.

[0123] Referring to FIG. 17, initially, the supplied power source voltage is not appropriate and is low for both the MCA dummy circuit **16B** and the MCB dummy circuit **16C**. First, the delay of the output signal from the MCB dummy circuit **16C** and the



period of the reference clock is compared by the comparator **15E** and, as a result, the power source voltage for the MCB dummy circuit **16C** is set to 1.0 V, which is optimal for one cycle. From the second cycle on, the comparator **15E** gives an in-phase output signal, and the power source voltage is kept at 1.0 V. As the power source voltage is set to the voltage corresponding to the high MOS transistor threshold voltage  $HV_t$  ( $=1.0$  V), the power source voltage of the interchange detection circuit **16D** in the MCA dummy circuit **16B** is settled to 1.0 V, and with settings such that the delay of the MCA dummy circuit **16B** and the reference clock signal are in phase with each other in this state, the power source voltage of the MCA dummy circuit **16B** is also set to 0.8 V, which is an optimal power source voltage. From the third cycle on, since an in-phase state is achieved, the power source voltage value is kept at 0.8 V.

[0124] It has been shown that in a path carrying both a circuit using MOS transistors of a high threshold voltage  $HV_t$  and a circuit using MOS transistors of a low threshold voltage  $LV_t$  as described above, the circuit of FIG. 16 is an effective configuration for a scheme in which optimal power source voltages are given to circuits where the power source voltage of the circuit on the high threshold voltage  $HV_t$  side is different from the power source voltage of the circuit on the low threshold voltage  $LV_t$  side. Specifically, in FIG. 16, the power source voltage of a circuit including only MOS transistors of a single predetermined threshold voltage is first determined by comparing the delay of the circuit with a predefined delay value, and then based on the determined power source voltage, the power source voltage value of the other circuit, i.e., the circuit including MOS transistors of a different predetermined threshold voltage, is determined.

[0125] If all paths carry a plurality of circuits including MOS transistors of different threshold voltages, there will be two variables, whereby the power source voltage cannot be settled for any of the circuits, and the feedback loop will not converge. In contrast, the feedback loop can converge by, as in the present example, first determining the power

source voltage of a circuit including MOS transistors of a predetermined threshold voltage by using a path including a plurality of MOS transistors of a single threshold voltage, and then determining the power source voltage of a circuit including MOS transistors of another threshold voltage by using the first determined power source voltage. Moreover, this scheme, as compared with the circuit scheme of FIG. 8 as described above, can be realized with an even smaller area because the DLL circuit, etc., are not needed.

[0126] Note that while the present example is an example where circuits of MOS transistors in which only the NMOS transistors have different threshold voltages are provided together, it can similarly be applied to an example where circuits of MOS transistors in which the PMOS transistors also have different threshold voltages are provided together. Moreover, it is understood that even if there are MOS transistors of three different threshold voltages, the power source voltage values can be determined based on the present scheme by producing a circuit including MOS transistors of a single threshold voltage, a circuit including MOS transistors of two different threshold voltages, and a circuit including MOS transistors of three different threshold voltages.

#### (Another Variation Of Memory Cell)

FIG. 18 shows another variation of a memory cell of a register file.

[0127] The figure shows a 1R/1W memory cell having a configuration obtained by combining together the second write port section 31BW, the transfer circuit 42, the second holding circuit 30B and the second read port section 31BR of FIG. 2, or a configuration obtained by combining together the first write port section 21AW, the transfer circuit 41, the first holding circuit 20A and the first read port section 21AR2.

[0128] In the figure, a write port AW is disabled and cannot write data when a data 2A write word line WL2 is at Hi. Between first and second inverted circuits 18A and 18B in a holding circuit 2B, the second inversion circuit 18B includes one PMOS transistor 94 and two NMOS transistors 18c and 18d. The drain of the second NMOS transistor 18c is

connected to the source of the first NMOS transistor **18d**, and the gate of the second NMOS transistor **18c** is connected to the data 2A write word line **WL2**. Moreover, the source of the second NMOS transistor **18c** is connected to the output of an inverter circuit **INV8** for inverting the data 2A write word line **WL2**. The operation of this circuit will now be described.

[0129] In the memory cell of the register file of FIG. 2, when Hi is written from the write bit line, the gate length of the NMOS transistor of the inversion circuit **I2** in the first holding circuit or the second holding circuit is determined by the current capacity of the corresponding PMOS transistor and the current capacity of the PMOS transistor in the write circuit connected to the bit line. Thus, the current capacity of the NMOS transistor of the inversion circuit **I2** needs to be sufficiently smaller than the driving ability of the PMOS transistor for bringing the holding circuit to Hi. Normally, since a reduction in area is desired for memory cells of these register files, a dimension close to the minimum transistor width of a MOS transistor of each process generation is used. The minimum transistor width is required also for the NMOS transistor or the PMOS transistor of the inversion circuit **I2**. In order to satisfy the driving ability constraint while using the minimum transistor width, conventional techniques increase the gate length of the NMOS transistor. For example, transistor dimensions that satisfy the driving ability constraint with a power source voltage of 0.8 V are as follows. For the 90 nm process generation and where the transistor width of the PMOS transistor of the inversion circuit **I2** is 0.3  $\mu\text{m}$  and the gate length thereof is 0.1  $\mu\text{m}$ , the NMOS transistor of the inversion circuit **I2** is required to have a transistor width of 0.3  $\mu\text{m}$  and a gate length of 1  $\mu\text{m}$ .

[0130] However, in the 65 nm process generation, due to the limit in lithography, it is only possible to form a MOS transistor whose gate length is about twice as large as the minimum gate length. By connecting together ten NMOS transistors whose gate length is 0.1  $\mu\text{m}$  in series, it is possible to form a transistor whose gate length is 1  $\mu\text{m}$ . With this

configuration, however, the area overhead will be excessive. This is because if a plurality of MOS transistors are connected in series, the diffusion width of the serial area requires a dimension that is about twice as large as the minimum gate length (0.1  $\mu\text{m}$  in this case). Thus, for a series of ten transistors, there is required a diffusion width of about  $0.1 \times 2 \times 9 =$   
5  $1.8 \mu\text{m}$  in the transistor gate length direction, whereby the size will be significantly larger than that of a single NMOS transistor whose gate length is  $1 \mu\text{m}$ .

[0131] In order to solve this problem, the present inventor has devised a memory cell as shown in FIG. 18. In the figure, when the data 2A write word line **WL2** is at Hi, the NMOS transistor **18c** is ON, whereby the inversion circuit **18B** functions as an ordinary  
10 inversion logic circuit. When the data 2A write word line is at L, the NMOS transistor **18c** is cut off, whereby the driving ability of the NMOS transistor **18c** can be made to appear lower, and it is possible to easily write Hi to the holding circuit **2B**. With this configuration, it is possible to realize memory cells without wastefully causing an area overhead even with advanced production processes.

15 [0132] Moreover, the memory cell shown in FIG. 18 is characteristic also in that the source of the NMOS transistor **18c** is connected to the output of the inversion circuit **INV8** of the data 2A write word line **WL2** instead of connecting it directly to the ground.

[0133] Assuming that the inversion circuit **INV8** of the data 2A write word line **WL2** is formed by an inverter, since the output node between the NMOS transistor **18d** and the  
20 PMOS transistor **94** of the inversion circuit **18B** is connected to the ground via the NMOS transistors **18d** and **18c** and the NMOS transistor in the inversion circuit **INV8** of the data 2A write word line **WL2**, these NMOS transistors are in a circuit configuration where three transistors are connected in series. Due to the influence of DIBL (Drain Induced Barrier Lower), the leak is reduced as the source-drain voltage is lower. The leak current  
25 ratio is 1:1/4 between a single NMOS transistor and a series of two NMOS transistors, and it is 1:1/10 for a series of three NMOS transistors. Therefore, as compared with a case

where the source of the NMOS transistor **18c** is directly grounded, the leak current can be reduced by about 60%.

[0134] Moreover, it is not necessary to provide new NMOS transistors, but the connection is made in series with an existing NMOS transistor in the inverter **INV8**,  
5 thereby causing no increase in area. Note that while the inversion circuit **INV8** of the data 2A write word line **WL2** does not have to be an inverter circuit, but may be any other type of circuit, a greater reduction in leak current can be achieved as a larger number of NMOS transistors are connected in series with one another and connected to the ground.

[0135] Note that in a case where the frequency with which the output from the  
10 inversion circuit **18A** is L is greater than the frequency with which the output from the inversion circuit **18A** is H, it is more preferred that the source of the NMOS transistor **18d** is connected to the output side of the inverter circuit **INV8**, the drain of the NMOS transistor **18d** is connected to the source of the NMOS transistor **18c**, and the drain of the NMOS transistor **18c** is connected to the input side of the inversion circuit **18A**. Then,  
15 the gate leak current can be further reduced and the number of times a read port **AR** is discharged can be reduced, whereby it is possible to reduce the power consumption.

[0136] FIG. 19 shows yet another variation of a memory cell of a register file, which is a 3W/1R memory cell.

[0137] A second inversion circuit **19B** in the holding circuit **2B** is formed by one  
20 PMOS transistor **95**, one first NMOS transistor **19c** whose gate is connected to the gate of the transistor **95**, and three second NMOS transistors **19d**, **19e** and **19f**. The gates of the three NMOS transistors **19d**, **19e** and **19f** are connected to the write word lines **WL2**, **WL3** and **WL4** of the corresponding three write ports. In the inversion circuit **19B** of the figure, when the three data write word lines **WL2** to **WL4** are at Hi, all of the NMOS  
25 transistors **19c**, **19d**, **19e** and **19f** are ON, whereby the inversion circuit **19B** functions as an ordinary inversion logic circuit. If any of the data 2A write word lines is at L,

corresponding one of the NMOS transistors **19c**, **19d**, **19e** and **19f** is cut off, whereby it is possible to easily write Hi to the holding circuit **2B**.

[0138] Moreover, the connection is such that data the 2C write word line **WL4**, which is connected to a second NMOS transistor that is farthest away from the first NMOS transistor **19c** of the second inversion circuit **19B**, i.e., the second NMOS transistor **19f**, has the highest activity rate, and the other second NMOS transistors **19e** and **19d** have successively decreasing activity rates. With this configuration, the gate leak current is reduced. This is because, where any write word line is at L and the other write word lines are at Hi, a comparison between the source-drain voltages of the second NMOS transistors **19f**, **19e** and **19d** shows that the NMOS transistor **19f** has the lowest source-drain voltage. Since the gate leak current is in proportion to an exponential function of the source-drain voltage of the MOS transistor, the gate leak current can be most reduced by connecting the write word line with the highest activity rate to the gate of the NMOS transistor **19f**, one of the four NMOS transistors of the inversion circuit **19B** that is closest to the ground.

[0139] Note that in a case where the frequency with which the output from an inversion circuit **19A** is L is greater than the frequency with which the output from the inversion circuit **19A** is H, it is preferred that the drain of the NMOS transistor **19d** is connected to the input side of the inversion circuit **19A**, the drain of the NMOS transistor **19c** is connected to the source of the NMOS transistor **19f**, and the source of the NMOS transistor **19c** is grounded. Then, the gate leak current can be further reduced and the number of times the read port **AR** is discharged can be reduced, whereby it is possible to reduce the power consumption.

[0140] (Application)

FIG. 20(a) is a specific application of FIG. 1.

[0141] In the figure, reference numeral **100** denotes a multi-thread processor that executes a plurality of threads while switching from one to another. When a thread

switching occurs, the context needs to be saved/restored to/from memory. Reference numeral 1 denotes the register file of the present invention also shown in FIG. 1, and reference numeral 1a denotes a context-saving/restoring register, which includes a plurality of second holding circuits 30B shown in FIG. 2. Reference numeral 1b denotes a normal register that is used by the processor 100 in operation, and includes a plurality of first holding circuits 20A shown in FIG. 2. Reference numeral 103 denotes an arithmetic and logical unit, which is a specific application of the functional block 2A of FIG. 2. Reference numeral 107 denotes a data bus, reference numeral 106 denotes an external memory provided outside the processor 100 and connected via the data bus 107, and reference numeral 104 denotes a transfer device for saving a context from the register 1a to the external memory 106 and restoring the context from the external memory 106 to the register 1a, which is a specific application of the functional block 2A of FIG. 2. Reference numeral 105 denotes a cache memory for storing data of the external memory 106, and 101 denotes a control section for controlling the transfer device 104, the register file 1 and the arithmetic and logical unit 103.

[0142] FIG. 20(b) is a timing diagram showing an operation of the processor 100 switching threads from one to another. Herein, at time T, the threads are switched from a thread A to a thread B. Near time T, restoration of the context of the thread B begins. Hatched portions with hatching lines extending in the lower right direction represent the restoration of a context, where the context is restored from the external memory 106 to the register 1a by utilizing the time periods in which no data is being transferred between the cache 105 and the external memory 106. Thus, the context of the thread B is being prepared in parallel to the execution of the thread A by the processor 100. At time T, the function of the register file of the present invention is used to interchange the contents of the register 1a with the contents of the register 1b. Thus, the context of the thread A is switched to the context of the thread B.

[0143] Then, after time T, the context of the thread A is saved. Hatched portions with hatching lines extending in the lower left direction represent the saving of a context, where the context is saved from the register 1a to the external memory 106 by utilizing the time periods in which no data is being transferred between the cache 105 and the external memory 106. Thus, the context of the thread A is saved to the external memory 106 in parallel to the execution of the thread B by the processor 100.

[0144] In the processor 100 as described above, the register 1 includes the context-saving/restoring register 1a, in addition to the normal register 1b used by the processor 100 in operation, in order to hide the context-saving/restoring penalty. With this configuration, the context of the thread B can be prepared while the thread A is being executed, whereby the thread can be switched to the thread B instantly at time T. Therefore, although it is necessary to provide registers of a total capacity that is twice as large as that of the registers 1b used in operation, it is possible, by using the register file of the present invention, to realize a small area, a low power consumption, and a high-speed operation.

[0145] FIG. 21 shows a variation of a multi-thread processor. In the figure, reference numeral 400 denotes a multi-thread processor that executes a plurality of threads while switching from one to another. In the processor 100 shown in FIG. 20, the single arithmetic and logical unit 103 is responsible for both the load/store operation and the arithmetic operation. In contrast, the processor 400 of the present example includes three arithmetic and logical units 408, 409 and 410 and one load/store unit 403. Moreover, the number of write ports is 1 and the number of read ports is 2 in each of the arithmetic and logical units 408, 409 and 410, whereas the number of write ports is 2 and the number of read ports is 1 in the load/store unit 403. Moreover, reference numeral 407 denotes a data bus, reference numeral 406 denotes an external memory provided outside the processor 400 and connected via the data bus 407, and reference numeral 404 denotes a transfer



device for saving a context from a context-saving/restoring register **501a** in a register file **501** to the external memory **406** and restoring the context from the external memory **406** to the register **501a**. Reference numeral **405** denotes a cache memory for storing data of the external memory **406**, and reference numeral **401** is a control section for controlling the transfer device **404**, the register file **501**, the arithmetic and logical units **408**, **409** and **410**, and the load/store unit **403**.

[0146] A timing diagram for an operation of switching threads by the processor **400** having such a configuration is similar to that of FIG. **20(b)**.

[0147] In the processor **400** as described above, the register file **501** includes the context-saving/restoring register **501a**, in addition to a normal register **501b** used by the processor **400** in operation, in order to hide the context-saving/restoring penalty. Therefore, although it is necessary to provide registers of a total capacity that is twice as large as that of the registers **501b** used in operation, it is possible, by using the register file of the present invention, to realize a small area, a low power consumption, and a high-speed operation. Particularly, in the present variation in which the number of ports of the register **501a** significantly differs from that of the register **501b**, the effect is more pronounced than with the case of FIG. **20**.

#### INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY

[0148] As described above, the present invention is useful as a semiconductor integrated circuit having a multiport type register file in which it is possible to reduce the number of ports required for one memory cell as compared with conventional techniques and to reduce the amount of time required for accessing data, and the present invention can suitably be used in mobile telephones, IC chips or non-portable electric products, which use the semiconductor integrated circuit of the present invention.